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Club's Address - G.P.O. Box 68A, Hobart, 7001

NEXT MEETING will be held in the Royal Society Room, Tasmanian Museum
on Thursday 21st August at 7.45 p.m.

Speakers - A mixed enthusiast

Subjects - A seven-fold variety show.

NEXT OUTING: Risdon Vale Dam area, plants and birds

Saturday 23rd August. Cars to leave 9.30 from Prince
Theatre to Risdon punt or 10.15 at the Risdon Vale Dam.

The August meeting will have a variety of subjects told or shown by our President Mr. Hurburnh telling us in a few minutes the history of our club - Miss M. Fraser follows up with the birds in her garden. To show us what honey eaters look like is Mr. Boss-Walker, while Miss Westbrook tells us something about her hobbies and crafts (I hope the top table is big enough for her exhibition). Number five is Miss Barbara Greenstreet showing slides with a difference. Our experienced traveller Miss Mosey will talk on birds; to be followed by slides from Miss Marilyn Matthey. Mr. Peter Fielding takes us to his homeland, New South Wales - apparently there are birds over there! The ninth suspect will stick to his trade - 'Colour in Landscaping', followed by slides from Mrs. J. Hoyle. Our second last action Mr. Len Wall will finish off the birds show while Mr. Kelsey Aves takes us to the grander mountain plateaus.

As you can see for everyone a little bit of his or her liking in nature.

Note: Start sharp 7.45 p.m. for business. 8.05 p.m. the show is on.

Our last outing into the Florentine Valley was a success. We left with sunshine, enjoyed the trip through the Derwent Valley and arrived in the rainy rainforest at 10.30 a.m. Luckily enough our raincoats were used only once. Our leader, Mr. David De Little really knew where to get the bugs. There were the dormant ones which became crawling ones, ordinary gum leaves in very odd manipulated shapes. Of course records were taken of the birds and we found a *Zieria* showing some pink flowers.

ZIERIA arborescens is a much branched shrub or small tree up to 4m. high - good for a background shrub in a garden. The foliage is in three parts or leaflets dark green above, 3-10 cm. long approximately 1.2-5 cm. wide. The flowers in a flat topped umbrella group (cyme) on the tips of the branches. The flowers are approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ cm. across and normally white. In full bloom it is an attractive shrub. Why must it be called 'Stinkwood'? It grows best in damp situations.

WANTED TO SELL

A Handbook of the Birds of Tasmania and its Dependencies, by F.M. Littler, published by the author, 1910. This is the original edition and in very good condition. Please make an offer to L.E. Wall, 63 Elphinstone Road, North Hobart. 7000

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED:

Victorian Naturalist with interesting article 'Some Common Venomous and Dangerous Animals of the Seashore'.

Burnie F.N.C. newsletter with 'Orchids to be found in the Rocky Cape National Park and other interesting areas of the North West Coast.

'Launceston Naturalist'; 'Darling Downs Naturalist';

'The Prothonotary'; 'N.S. Naturalist'; 'Nats' News'

'Hobart Walking Club'. Environment Abstracts- Tas. Vol. 1 No. 2.

Habitat - THE WONDERFUL SOUTH-WEST For six issues per annum you pay \$3.00 only or become a member of the Australian Conservation Foundation and receive other publications also for \$11.00 per annum

Instructions to Young Naturalist We acknowledge kindly the gift of this book from Dr. Curtis before going overseas. It will be available from our library.

LITTLE GEM DIGGERS (Nats' News) (Australian Lapidary Magazine, June 1975)

If ever a person would try to tell me that animals can be trained to dig for sapphires, he would be talking to deaf ears. But did you know that there are animals which dig and bring up sapphires?

I noticed a paragraph in a lapidary book in which the author claimed that ants bring up sapphires together with other stones and drop them around their nests, that is, if there are any sapphires in the ground. One has to actually see this to apprehend the full impact of the facts.

Years ago my wife and I set off for Tumberumba to try our luck with sapphires. Neither of us knew what a sapphire looked like, but we soon learned that if there is no spinel in the sieve or pan there is no sapphire - the more spinel, the more sapphire. Going back to the tent for lunch we noticed a lot of spinel lying on the bush track, and sure enough we found sapphires on the track. Not many, because most likely the surface had been well searched before.

We also noticed ants' nests with much spinel strewn around the holes, sapphires and zircons too. So the author of that article was right after all. I did not dare go too close as I knew well the little brutes would bite if disturbed. What species they were I had no idea, but they were half-an-inch in length and it seemed wise to me to keep a safe distance, but I wanted the sapphires, so what? A long-handled shovel and a couple of buckets helped us out. I quickly filled the buckets with dirt from the ants' nest and ran towards the creek, stopping every two metres to shake off ants. Down at the creek we submerged the buckets quickly. We got about two dozen sapphires from the two buckets of dirt, and a lot more afterwards. Since that time we have been back repeatedly to Tumberumba Creek not only for sapphires but also the blackberries which are plentiful there.

Then one day I had the idea of taking a photo of an ant as it carried a sapphire away from its nest. This wasn't going to be easy, but I bought a new camera before inflation priced it out of reach for me, and set off. It was about 37° in the shade, a day everyone would enjoy in swimming togs. I put on overalls, gum boots and tied the overall legs around the gum boots with string. Next I set the camera adjustments and slipped gloves on, hoping the ants would leave my face alone, because I had nothing to cover it up with. Next I looked for an ant-hill. They all seemed to have vanished, or perhaps they had all been dug up by people looking for sapphires. There was one left for me about 100 metres up the creek, and there were little ants busily carrying dirt and stones from their burrows. I looked out for the hole with the most activity, and as slowly as I could

knelt down in front of it. This stirred the ants considerably and they started racing across the ground in all directions. Kneeling immobile in front of that ant nest was not like relaxing in an arm chair. A few of the ants became suspicious, but in general they calmed down and left me alone.

For how long I waited, I don't know; it seemed an eternity to me, and when it actually happened I nearly missed the shot because it was so quick. Before I realised that the little stone that was coming up out of the ants' nest was a sapphire, the ant was already carrying it away from the hole. I pressed the release and got my photo. Well, that was that, and being grateful people, we left the anthill alone and even said "Thankyou".

TREE TALK with Graeme Briton. 3' SASSAFRAS. *Atherosperma moschatum* Labill.

Fam. Monimiaceae. Sassafras was the Spanish name given to the small North American tree with medicinal bark and fragrant leaves, *Sassafras officinale*, of the family Lauraceae. In Australia the name Sassafras was given to two of the family Monimiaceae; Northern Sassafras, *Doryphora sassafras* and Southern Sassafras, *Atherosperma moschatum*. Only Southern Sassafras grows in Tasmania where it is simply known as Sassafras. The trees grow in moist, shaded rainforests in association with Blackwood and Myrtle. It can grow to a height of 45 metres and a diameter of a metre or so. It has a straight trunk with regularly formed branches sometimes persisting to the ground. From a distance it would be easy to mistake Sassafras for a gymnosperm. The bark is smooth, grey-green and short-grained. It has a fragrance similar to nutmeg or cinnamon and contains resin and an essential oil. It has been used for brewing a tea and also as an aperient. In former years it was used to make "Sassy Beer". The pleasantly aromatic leaves are opposite, ovate to lanceolate, dark green, smooth and shiny on top and dull whitish below. They are usually serrated. The scented creamy flowers hang downwards from the branches and are better seen from underneath the tree. They appear from August to October and are of two kinds on separate trees but sometimes one tree can have both. The botanical name of the tree comes from a feature of the fruits which bear long plumes. "Ather" is Greek for the "beard" which hangs from an ear of corn and "sperma" a seed. "Moschatum" refers to its musk-like smell. The timber is grey to light brown in colour and is close grained, fine and smooth. The heartwood is frequently black and this gives rise to a much sought-after figuring called "black-heart". Although the leaves and bark are strongly scented, the timber has no peculiar odour. The wood is mostly used to make brush handles and clothes pegs, the Sabco and Pioneer company using the wood freely. The plywood factory in Somerset uses Sassafras as a core veneer in the manufacture of plywood. Along with other 'lesser' timber trees, it is being chipped to make pulp for the production of paper and hard board. SASSAFRAS BEER 4 galls. water. 2 oz. bark, 4 lbs. sugar. 1 oz hops, 2 oz. ginger, 2 apples. Boil for half an hour. strain and add yeast when lukewarm. Let stand for one day then bottle. Ready to drink in a few days.